

Memories of Biloxi & NKP

by Douglas Bodsford "Bods" Smith - sent May 31, 2017

Hi Mike! With apologies for so much I've forgotten, here some things I believe I remember:

Gulfport

Same trailer park & carpooling in (one day you were driving and the windshield fogged over to much that we couldn't see anything and debated on whether the A/C or the defroster would work best).

Lunches, etc. I always like to tell the story that you fried spam for lunch and the smell was so bad that I could hardly eat my banana sandwiches! Don't remember peanut butter, but working my way through college I survived to some extent on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, so I might have fixed some of those there.

"BOOGA BOOGA" - looking back it was very stupid of me, but only one of a great number of unwise choices I made over the years. Fortunately nothing really bad resulted.

Don't remember Joe Joseph walking into a wall, but y'all spent more time with them than we did. I remember going to some affair when Joe's wife came dressed as a "long cool woman in a black dress"! Joe and I rented a boat and went fishing where he hooked a pretty nice fish; unfortunately I bungled trying to net it and it got away (he never forgave me for that). I was wearing my very special Styrofoam "jungle hat" that I had had for many years; it blew off and Joe, being at the helm, was still pissed about his fish and refused to go get it!

Back at the trailer park I often went down to the park across the street to the playground and played chess with an old man while watching the kids. Once we hired the daughter of a sergeant living in the park as a baby sitter, and she locked our kids in a bedroom and had friends over to have sex in our bed. Of course the sergeant denied that such a thing was possible!

You probably weren't aware then, but I officially received my PhD during our Gulfport time. Six long excruciating years of getting screwed in every way imaginable, but I persevered and got it. And of course, the reason I left the AFA was that I needed to get promoted to major (else I might have been RIF'd at 16 years after fulfilling my obligation for the time spent at NCSU working on my PhD), and USAFA academy faculty weren't getting promoted at that time. When I talked with Randolph about curtailing my USAFA tour they said that if I did, I would be sent to Vietnam BUT I could volunteer for Thailand. All this to say that it worked and I was notified at NKP that I had been promoted.

Other than that, I have few other memories of the Gulfport time worth sharing.

NKP: Probably not many memories of our time together, but here are some of them.

To start with, we had bought a little house in Panama City [Florida] for Kay and kids to live in while I was at NKP. Had the tickets and everything ready to go when we heard from the female major at NKP that our move was put on hold. That was really tough on K as she had prepared long and hard mentally for me to leave and be gone then, and she broke down and cried. But a week or two later I got the word to go on over and started the longest air trip of my life.

First, having lost the original reservations I had to go standby all the way. I remember eventually making it out to SFO and catching a bus to Travis early evening where I sat in the terminal until a flight opened up. Sometime near midnight I got a middle seat on a stretch 727 and got to walk about briefly when it refueled in Hawaii. I remember that the sun was just rising as we arrived at Clark. Then I had to wait in the terminal for a C-130 flight to NKP via somewhere in Vietnam. The plane we were to take had some kind of problems and we must have had half a dozen false starts: first we were called and lined up to board, then sent back. Then later we got on the plane but had to deplane and return to the terminal. Finally we got on the plane and took off, only to return and send us back into the terminal. With the exception of the last one, some of the others happened more than once! But eventually sometime in the middle of the night we took off and with the one stop got to NKP. Having lost track of time, the best I could figure was that the trip took something in excess of 50 hours.

I don't remember doing too much with all the guys at NKP. I was lucky enough to get half an air conditioned trailer (an O-6 was in the other half) about a hundred yards from the O Club, and I think at least some of the rest of y'all were in the barracks?

Anyhow, a few things I do remember: my playing "Danny Boy" on the "nose flute;" the idea of the "Boom Bird" and getting patches made; spending hours at the MARS facility awaiting an opportunity for just a few minutes' call to Kay; the USO where Gary(?) fell in love with Bang-An (sp?) and brought her back stateside to marry her; being recruited at the last minute to fill out a squadron league basketball team (I remember that the game ended in a 4-4 tie and we lost in overtime!); the outdoor movie theater ("beware of the B movies" was the byword, but some were pretty good and definitely time killers); the O Club stopping playing Christmas music

because it was too depressing (and the greeting then was “Merry Fucking Christmas”!); trips into town in which the driver occupied only half a seat because Buddha was riding with him; sitting on the patio of the Playboy Club and watching the war going on across the river (I went broke shopping there, but the jewelry, etc., is still great today); the first trip into town one evening when the smells were overwhelming and a pathetic beggar crawled up to me with a crumbled aluminum pan asking for a handout; the night the base was “attacked” and the alarm sounded – the only casualty was a captain who accidentally fired his rifle into a rock and a piece of the rock cut into his leg); being “offered” the wonderful opportunity to go to Osan to finish out the 366 day tour, but not qualifying because I didn’t know Cobol (it would have taken a day or two to learn it since I was proficient in PL-1, but they didn’t know that!); Joe singing “Ain’t no Sunshine in Osan”; waking up one morning to find all the banana trees on base slashed down (a tenant there was the “Knives,” who probably were the ones who attempted the abortive raid on the “Hanoi Hilton” prison camp, and who probably vented their frustration that the operation had been compromised); having our operation shut down only a couple of months after our arrival, leaving two months or so before we could get reassigned and sent back home:

➔ I look back at those two months and am disappointed in myself at not using the time better to improve my programming skills and education. Instead I read a lot, shopped downtown a lot, and did manage to be occupied in what could have been something useful, but it wasn’t:

Some captain trying to make a name for himself had convinced the powers in charge that it would be possible to locate enemy artillery pieces by triangulating using the times that the sounds of the firing reached the sensors. In theory it was a great idea but fatally flawed: first the locations of the sensors needed to be known with great precision; and secondly, the times had to be coordinated, in sync, and very precise. I was asked to organize a team to create a program to do that, and it didn’t take me too long to see that the unknowns/inaccuracies would make it impossible to get any precision from the results.

Nonetheless I was instructed to design software to do the job, organize a team to put the program together, and get it done. I did the necessary calculations and put together a team of maybe 6 -10 of our guys, and the program worked perfectly as designed. And as I expected, it was useless finding, e.g., artillery pieces in the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin. But it did help to pass the time.

I remember the going-away gathering held for us in some aircraft hangar. I came away thinking that the prevailing sentiment was not happiness that we were getting to go home, but being pissed off that they weren't.¹

You and I flew back to the States together, stopping at Clark (I think) to RON en route where we were approached by some attractive prostitutes. I guess business was slow for them that night so I enjoyed chatting with one of them and even though I couldn't help her in her profession, I did give her a little tip in gratitude for the time.

Post NKP: Didn't get to see y'all much while we were in the DC area as you were in the Pentagon and I was in the Defense Communications Engineering Center in Reston [VA]. But we do remember being invited over to your place at least once for a party and really enjoyed it. Unfortunately, after that time we lost track of y'all.

Following my DCEC tour I spent three years in the Pentagon in the Air Staff Studies and Analysis Division, then three years at the National Defense University as the Deputy Director of the Decision Systems Directorate. Punched out in 1982 right at my 20 year point and moved into a position as Associate Professor of Management Science for Virginia Tech (teaching quant courses in their MBA program). For many reasons that didn't work out and in 1984 one of my students recruited me to join a systems engineering company supporting the intelligence community.

I add this background because it led up to a very serendipitously meeting with you that summer. I resigned my post at VT after the spring semester and, knowing that I likely would never have the opportunity to do so again, before starting my new job took the family on a 6,000 mile vacation tour in our 27' class C motor home we named "RV" (pulling a Honda Civic for local transportations). We started here in Herndon, went down to Tallahassee & Panama City, across the southern tier to the Grand Canyon, up to Mesa Verde and across to Colorado Springs, up to the Badlands of SD, and then across east to home. We did it all in 30 days and one of our stops was a very memorable one.

While in the Pentagon I was the Air Staff's expert in nuclear weapons effects, and as part of that had attended a NWE school in ABQ and enjoyed exploring the area some while there. So we built in a stop in ABQ and while stocking up on groceries at the commissary came across Helen! Long story short, you folks VERY generously put together a gathering at your place with many of the old DFMA guys, and we will forever appreciate your doing that for us! Not only was the gathering wonderful, our kids had a blast exploring the big hill behind your place with your kids! In addition to the social time, it was

¹ [Editor] The (remaining) guys would always sing, "Happy Trails to You, Until We Meet Again" as the guys departed and got on their plane.

great to enjoy something different from our routines that consisted mainly of travel, campgrounds, and sight-seeing.

We parked RV on a street also behind your house and spent the night there. Not wanting to further interrupt your routines, we didn't check in with you the next morning before we left, but I remember thinking we saw y'all in the window looking out and waving goodbye to us.

So that, my friend, is the best I can do with what comes to mind; however, if you have things you can remind me of that I might be able to elaborate on, please do so and I'll do my best!

Thanks for the memories and for keeping in touch -



Mike Blackledge <mablackledgepicasa@gmail.com> Jun 1

to Bods, mike

Bods:

Great stuff - very much appreciated!

Now for the editing/creative process of melding it with my own thoughts and memories. Fortunately some of what you sent also triggered some of my own! Remember this? "Black men fighting the red men in a white man's war!"

That was in the trailer for one of the (Friday night?) movies at NKP theatre- I recall me or someone asking, "what's the movie this week?" And Joe Joseph responding "what's the difference? We're all going to watch it anyway!"

Thanks again,

Mike/Blackie

Sent from my iPad